

my fire grant amendment to the Iraq and Hurricane Katrina emergency supplemental bill. Although there are procedural reasons why I cannot offer this amendment at this time, it would provide an additional \$100 million for firefighter assistance grants to address the 9/11 Commission's finding that Congress should give high priority to providing funding for communications connectivity in high-risk areas.

We should implement the recommendations of the independent, bipartisan 9/11 Commission and finally protect our ports and airports, our borders and mass-transit systems, our chemical and nuclear power plants, and our food and water supplies from terrorist attack. In July 2004, the 9/11 Commission submitted to Congress and the Nation a report containing 41 recommendations on how to improve intelligence operations and homeland security. In December 2004, Congress enacted the Intelligence Reform Act, "the 9/11 Act", authorizing several of these recommendations. However, we have failed to live up to the commitments made in the 9/11 Act.

Almost every single one of the recommendations made in the 9/11 Act on homeland security has been significantly underfunded. In addition, there has been a severe lack of leadership and competency at the Department of Homeland Security—culminating in the failed response to Hurricane Katrina. On December 5, 2005, when the 9/11 Commission issued its final report card, it gave the administration and Congress a series of C's, D's, and F's on many areas in homeland security. These areas include port security, border security, aviation security, chemical plant security, and first responders. We should have an aggressive, robust plan to secure our homeland, and this amendment would implement one of the 9/11 Commission's recommendations.

In the 9/11 Commission's December 2005 report card, the administration received an "F" on communications for first responders. Indeed, Hurricane Katrina exposed that, 4 years after 9/11, little progress has been made in creating a system where police, fire, and emergency medical service departments can communicate with each other. Homeland Security's fiscal year 2007 budget decreases first responder and homeland security funding by \$400 million, which affects first responders across Illinois and throughout the Nation. Additional Federal funds are needed to protect our investments in homeland security preparation and response.

Last year, more than \$25 million was awarded to Illinois fire departments for equipment. Unfortunately, the fiscal year 2007 budget reduces funding for the Fire Program from \$545 million to \$293 million. This program provides equipment and training to fire departments in Illinois and across the country to help them prepare and respond to terrorist incidents. One way to as-

sist firefighters is to make sure that they have the necessary equipment that makes it possible for them to communicate across departments and agencies.

In Illinois, STARCOM21 is the official statewide public safety two-way radio system. It has been designed to serve State, local, and Federal law enforcement agencies statewide by facilitating multi-agency communication through radio interoperability. This important program is part of a push by the Federal Government to address communication problems experienced by first responders during national emergencies. As part of its STARCOM program, Illinois has purchased and distributed radios to 698 law enforcement agencies at a cost of \$3,899,630, for an average cost of approximately \$6,000 each; 755 fire departments at a cost of \$4,531,580; and 212 emergency management, public health, and other agencies at a cost of \$1,272,882. This is a total of 1,665 radios for \$9.7 million. This is a little more than half of the universe of public safety agencies in the State. Illinois would like to provide additional radios to some of the larger cities—there are 10 cities in Illinois with populations over 100,000 people—but Federal assistance is required.

My amendment addresses the 9/11 Commission's recommendation that first responders have interoperable communications equipment. My amendment would provide an additional \$100 million for interoperable communications equipment so that first responders can respond to natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and other public safety needs. Fire grants are already used by some jurisdictions for the purpose of obtaining communications equipment, and my amendment sets aside a pool of funding to encourage more departments to do so. This is important to help emergency responders field effective and reliable interoperable communications equipment to respond to natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and the public safety needs of America's communities.

The lack of interoperable communications for America's first responders puts them and our communities in danger. Too many of our police, fire, emergency medical services, and transportation officials cannot communicate with each other, and our local departments are not able to link their communications with State and Federal emergency response agencies. A June 2004 U.S. Conference of Mayors survey found that 94 percent of cities do not have interoperable capability between police, fire, and emergency medical services, and 60 percent of cities do not have interoperable capability with the State emergency operations center. Almost half of the cities that responded to the survey said that a lack of interoperable communications had made response to an incident within the last year difficult. In November 2003, OMB testified before Congress that there is insufficient funding in place to solve

the Nation's interoperability problem, and it would cost more than \$15 billion to begin to fix the problem.

I appreciate Senator STABENOW's work on this issue and her cosponsorship of this important amendment. This is such an important issue for firefighters in Illinois and across the country that when there is another opportunity, I intend to bring this amendment before the Senate, and I hope that my colleagues will consider supporting it.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I am a cosponsor of amendment 3662 by my friend from Wisconsin, Senator FEINGOLD. His amendment, which would have ensured continued support for the Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, was ruled "nongermane" by the Parliamentarian.

This is inexplicable and unfortunate. But the real travesty is that the majority, which could simply agree to accept this amendment, would prefer to hide behind the Parliamentarian's ruling and let it die.

By all accounts, with the exception of the snipes of some anonymous Pentagon officials and their friends in the majority party who do not want the colossal blunders of the Iraq reconstruction program exposed to the light of day, the special inspector general has done an excellent job under difficult and dangerous conditions.

He has uncovered numerous instances of waste and fraud—some, shocking in their audacity—and there are dozens of investigations and prosecutions under way.

There is another \$1.6 billion for Iraq reconstruction in this supplemental for precisely the same types of activities that have been funded under the Iraq relief and reconstruction fund.

But in this bill they are funded under traditional foreign operations accounts, not under the Iraq relief and reconstruction fund.

What this means is that, by not adopting the Feingold amendment, the special inspector general will not have oversight of these funds.

Apparently the idea is for the State Department inspector general to take over this responsibility. But that office has no people in Iraq, no plan or budget to put people there, and no ability to do the job any time soon. They have said so themselves.

This is nothing more than a transparent attempt to shut down the only effective oversight of this massive reconstruction program which has been plagued by mismanagement and fraud.

Projects have been poorly designed, grossly over priced, and many will never be finished, while U.S. contractors such as Halliburton have made off with huge profits.

We are told by our friends in the majority, acting on behalf of some in the Pentagon and the White House who want to shut down the Office of the Special Inspector General, that they just want to return to the "regular order." That is their explanation for